Launch Time
**SU’s “Missile” aims for the Heisman.**

Though not yet as renowned as his brother, Qadry, who pronounces his Islamic name KAH-dree IS-MILE, is considered one of the nation’s most talented and flamboyant players and a viable Heisman candidate. Should he be subjected to Heisman hype, Qadry insists the lessons learned from his brother’s experience will serve him well.

“I remember talking to my brother during that season (1990) and asking him if he felt a lot of pressure. He said he didn’t,” says Qadry. “Then I saw him and I realized there was so much stress on him. He had stress bumps on his face. He was under so much pressure because of the national focus on Notre Dame and all the media attention. We’ve talked about it and he’s told me ways of trying to not let things get to me.

“I still think being in the Heisman race would be a great opportunity for any athlete, and I’d be lying to you if I said I didn’t want to be a part of that. It’d be an honor to say I made a run for the Heisman.”

To say that Qadry’s college career has come a long way in a short time would be quite an understatement. This time last year he wasn’t even considered a certain starter at wide receiver.

He’d been a disappointment as a sophomore. Given his first starting assignment in the 1990 opener against Southern Cal, he dropped several passes, including a possible touchdown reception. Although he later revealed he’d played the game with a broken finger, Ismail gained a reputation for being butterfingered. He quickly lost his starting spot and his confidence, and, other than returning kickoffs, rarely played again that season.

Still, Syracuse coach Paul Pasqualoni says he never doubted Ismail’s talent. “He has everything you want in a wide receiver—the acceleration, size, and toughness,”

Like glue: Qadry Ismail, a Syracuse University senior and star football player, made some new friends this summer at the Town of DeWitt Parks and Recreation Department. It was his second summer working as a recreation aid.

What had always been the most celebrated projectile in the Ismail clan was stopped on a street in Boston last December.

“Hey, I know who you are,” Raghib “Rocket” Ismail was told. “You’re the Missile’s brother, aren’t you?”

How things change. This time last year, the lone headliner among the Ismails was Raghib, the football-famous Rocket and former Notre Dame All-American. Brother Qadry, the Syracuse University “Missile,” was simply a part-time player with a garish nickname. A football season full of big plays later, Qadry had also become a star, having gained All-American honors and an identity that had more to do with accomplishments than bloodlines.

This year, the Syracuse University senior has his sights on winning something his older brother almost won, the Heisman Trophy, awarded annually to America’s top college football player. The Rocket finished second to Brigham Young’s Ty Detmer in the 1990 Heisman voting.

“My brother should have won it,” says Qadry. “I think most people know he was the best player in the nation.”

If nothing else, the Rocket certainly qualified as college football’s most celebrated player during his final college season. He was a media darling. The tradition of Notre Dame, his skills, nickname, and much-awaited decision whether to turn professional after his junior season—he did—helped make the Rocket a household name in sports circles.

Published by SURFACE, 1992
Pasqualoni says. “But none of those things do a lot of good unless he has the ball in his hands. I think he really committed himself to working on catching the football before last season. If he catches the football good things will happen, and that was the case last season.”

Restored to the starting lineup, Ismail became something of an overnight sensation beginning with SU’s 1991 season-opening defeat of Vanderbilt. He had one of those don’t-blink-or-you-might-miss-something-special type of seasons. He caught 37 passes, ran reverses, returned kickoffs, and traumatized defenses with touchdown plays covering 31, 36, 43, 44, 64, 65, and 95 yards.

“He’s a potential home-run threat every time he touches the football,” Ohio State coach John Cooper said before last year’s Hall of Fame Bowl, won 24-17 by SU.

After the season, Ismail was selected by the Football Writers Association of America as a member of its 1991 All-America team. A star hurdler on the track team, he is Syracuse’s first two-sport All-American since Jim Brown (football 1956 and lacrosse 1957).

Ismail’s talents aren’t confined to athletics. He’s also an entertaining public speaker.

Ismail was the toast of the Fiesta Bowl Spring Banquet in Phoenix, where he was honored in May as one of the bowl game’s preseason All-America selections. Ismail and 10 other college football players were recognized for their excellence in athletics, academics, and citizenship.

“The kids are all interviewed in front of 1,500 people at the banquet, and Qadry was easily the best interview among all the kids we’ve had here,” says Brent DeRaad, Fiesta Bowl public relations director. “Qadry impressed everyone with his personality. He was doing George Bush impersonations.”

For someone whose football skills and family name could soon make him an athletic demigod, Ismail has an abundance of innocence and charm and a comforting lack of jock-related arrogance. Heisman hopes notwithstanding, Ismail seems genuinely unimpressed with himself, and says he wants to be remembered more as a person of character than just another character in cleats. His growing fame, as he sees it, is best employed as a user-friendly tool. He says one of the best aspects of his success is having ample opportunities to influence others.

To that end, Ismail spent portions of the last two summers playing with Syracuse-area kids as a recreation aid with the Town of DeWitt Parks and Recreation Department. He helped coordinate activities, and, says assistant director John Rathbun, was instrumental in resolving a minor racial conflict.

The incident, says Ismail, was a “misunderstanding between middle-class kids and inner-city type kids. Both sides needed a better understanding of one another and I tried to get that point across to them.”

Ismail was a welcome addition to the summer program, says Rathbun. “We usually get two SU football players to work for us every summer,” he says. “We usually don’t get the star players, but Qadry doesn’t come across as a star. He doesn’t come in and say, ‘I’m Qadry and my brother is the Rocket.’ The kids are attracted to him like glue, and he relates so well with them. There’s something special about him, and I mean that.”

—BOB HILL